

Dual Enrollment State Task Force
K-12 Education Representatives
Summary of Concerns and Recommendation – December 14, 2006

K-12 educators, both on the task force and throughout Montana, have expressed general support for dual enrollment opportunities.

As K-12 representatives on the task force, we believe that dual enrollment opportunities can be important and effective supplements to the curricular opportunities provided by local school districts.

We also believe that existing bridge programs like Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Tech Prep are important opportunities that high school students throughout the state are currently utilizing and should be able to access more fully.

Finally, K-12 representatives on the task force are in agreement that dual enrollment opportunities should supplement and not supplant high school curriculum and course offerings.

Background

State law authorizes dual enrollment opportunities in Montana. This law, known as Montana's Running Start Act, was approved during the 2001 legislative session with the support of many in the K-12 education community. Running Start allows college coursework to be counted toward high school credit requirements, and specifies that students may dually enroll. This means that high schools and colleges may count the same dually enrolled student for funding purposes at both levels.

Montana's Running Start Act is also explicit in stating that dual enrollment courses may only be offered "to obtain credits in classes not available through the school district." This specific language was highly important to the passage of the Running Start Act in 2001 as it made licensure issues, the fulfillment of content and performance standards, and the supplanting of high school curriculum moot.

In recent years, local school districts and higher education institutions have gone beyond this limitation and have offered coursework for dual enrollment purposes that essentially serve as a replacement for courses that are available in the local school district. When members of the K-12 community have questioned this practice, we have been told that the courses are by definition different in that they are "college courses" and therefore, cannot be offered at the high school level. Based on this interpretation, colleges and local districts have expanded their offerings. Students are now exiting their high school buildings to receive courses such as American Government, American History, World History, Spanish, English Literature and Composition, and others, at nearby colleges or through distance learning. All these courses are simultaneously being taught at the students' local high schools.

Discussion of concerns:

While the K-12 members of the panel do not object to individual students taking dual enrollment courses, the notion that these courses will be offered at reduced tuition, without licensed personnel, and without verifying that the courses meet Board of Public Education content and performance standards leads to several undesired outcomes.

First, an incentive is created for students to bypass high school course offerings, if possible. What rational parent would want his or her child to take a course at the high school when a reduced cost, college credit bearing alternative is being offered through dual enrollment? In many ways, the very existence of dual enrollment for these courses is akin to a state-sponsored college scholarship program, but only for high school students who opt to leave their high school classes in order to attend college. Parents and students would be foolish not to take advantage of such a system considering that they would lose eligibility for the scholarship simply by fulfilling their high school graduation requirements at the high school.

Given this level of incentive, enrollment in a high school's course offerings will be impacted, as has already occurred in some Montana districts. Such a practice will diminish the breadth of course offerings for those students who are not eligible to take dual enrollment courses. For instance, in small school districts, the loss of even five or six students may make it inefficient to present an AP English course, a world history course, or other curricular offerings that are important for many students, but require sufficient enrollment to justify their existence. Even if districts opt to keep several of these courses, students remaining at the high school will have less interaction with their college-bound peers; negatively impacting the very students that dual enrollment is intended to assist

In this context, districts would be unable to offer the full range of educational opportunities to all students as part of Montana's constitutional guarantee to a free, quality public school system.

It is also likely that many students, recognizing the immense incentive provided under dual enrollment, will jump into the college setting without adequate preparation or college readiness. For these students, dual enrollment could result in lost time and resources, should the student either fail, or fail to complete, the course.

Secondly, by turning the delivery of high school course requirements over to non-licensed personnel, the school district will be unable to meet federal and state requirements for teacher licensure. These requirements may not be waived and the consistent violation of these standards will lead to accreditation violations, loss of federal funds, and other sanctions for Montana school districts.

Finally, it will fall upon the Board of Public Education and Office of Public Instruction to assure that dual credit courses meet the content and performance expectations of the Board of Public Education. Clearly, while local boards have the discretion to waive requirements in individual circumstances, a broad waiver of requirements for entire

classes of students will necessitate additional scrutiny of course offerings that are simply not intended to be part of the high school curriculum.

Recommendations:

For these reasons, the K-12 members on the panel asked the full committee to consider a variety of parameters that might be put in place to at least mitigate some of these negative consequences. Two suggested options were proposed:

- 1) Limit dual enrollment opportunities as was envisioned in the Running Start statute to only those courses that are “not available” through the school district.
- 2) Allow dual enrollment courses without restriction for those courses “not available” from the school district. Require jointly taught courses, (involving both a licensed and endorsed K-12 educator from the partnering district and a college faculty member) for any dual enrollment courses that replace or substitute for high school curricular offerings within the same content area.

Option 1 simply suggests that Montana districts and institutions abide by the 2001 Running Start legislation. In this way, licensure issues and unintended consequences for districts can be kept to a minimum without a significant change in the way that most dual enrollment courses are run. Several states have similar restrictions in place, limiting dual enrollment opportunities to those courses that are not taught at the high school level.

Option (2) was less desirable to K-12 members as it essentially allows districts to supplant their own offerings. However, it also is compelling for a number of reasons. First, it builds from a basic conviction that course offerings for high school students must align with Montana content and performance standards. As such, those courses should be taught, or at least co-taught, by Montana licensed educators, in accordance with state and federal policy. Secondly, it allows for districts and higher education institutions to work collaboratively to address the real needs of students, while also meeting state standards. Finally, there is some evidence that establishing a more formal teaching partnership between high school and college faculty may indeed lead to enhanced benefits for students. An American Youth Policy Forum study suggested the following reasons why:

When secondary and postsecondary faculties collaborate to create a classroom experience that combines college content and supportive instructional techniques, students are able to benefit from the best of both worlds. The postsecondary faculty partner delivers content material covered in traditional college classrooms, ensuring the integrity of the courses. The secondary faculty provides insight on managing younger students and effective instructional strategies. Students’ exposure to college-level courses and rigor, with support on homework, testing, and projects, creates a true transitional experience to blend the familiar and the new. (*The College Ladder*, American Youth Policy Forum, 2006, p. 123.)

K-12 members of the task force believe that this recommendation is not only appropriate given existing licensure and policies governing course offerings within the K-12 system, but is desirable when considering the long-term benefit for Montana students.

It is the hope of task force members that these recommendations will provide a means to deliver on the promise of dual enrollment opportunities, without leading to unintended consequences for Montana high schools and their students.

